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Interviewer: Hi, my name is Amos Patrick and I've been living in Estes Park for about the last five years. When I moved here one of the most exciting things about coming to Estes Park from Iowa was the idea that I might run into famous climbers. Little did I know that I Actually moved in across the street from one of Estes' most notable climbers, Douglas Snively. I've had the great opportunity to go out and have adventures with Douglas and be his climbing partner. So today I'm going to interview Douglas for the Estes Park Museum and the Estes Park Library. [This interview is also available in video format, filmed by Brian Brown. The interview was transcribed by Tom Williams with assistance from Alicia Mittelman.]

Let's start out with some basic information; can you just state your name?

Douglas Snively: My name is Melvin Douglas Snively.

Interviewer: Your birthdate?

Douglas Snively: I was born September 26, 1953 in Colorado Springs, Colorado, Memorial Hospital.

Interviewer: When did you start climbing?

Douglas Snively: I started climbing around when I was 16 years old.

Interviewer: Tell us about that.

Douglas Snively: I started climbing. It was kind of weird how it started. I always loved climbing trees, I loved climbing on the garage, up the fence, walk along the fence to the top of the garage, go up to the peak, jump off the roof. So me and another neighbor kid, was quite a bit younger before I ever started climbing, we had tree houses down along this river. We just had tree houses, I loved the movie "Tarzan" where he would swing off lines, so we had little lines we'd swing over from one limb to the next and stuff, it was a lot of fun. I think that was really when I started climbing. When I look back at that, there was like some of grass roots sort of speak, so it was a lot of fun. So I started climbing and I kind of got started and I'd ride my bike a lot, and I'd ride my bike out to the Garden of the Gods, which was about four miles from my parent's house. One day I'm watching these guys and they had this Tyrolean setup from South Gateway Rock up to the top of White Spire there. They're hooting and hollering, having a great time and they would rappel down. I just, "Wow, that's really pretty cool." So I went to the library, checked out this book and it was the only book that just had a small section of climbing on it. It had this guy with the nickers and the nicker socks and wooden rung ladders. He had a ball peen hammer for a hammer. My dad has a ball peen hammer, so I made up

some stuff and then a friend of my, Barton Chambon from school and I would climb. He lived on the hogback out in the Garden of the Gods. So he had a little cliff in the back yard, so we'd top rope stuff. As things progressed I met other people out in the Garden of the Gods. In Colorado Springs there's the C.C. College, Colorado College which is quite good. They had a little mountaineering club there. They'd give these little shows, so once I went. Art Hals [?], Don Deset, and Mike Dudley had just finished doing The Nose of El Cap, and they probably did a very early ascent, maybe the sixth or seventh ascent of The Nose. So they set up this big sheet of plywood and they had bolt hangers on it and they showed how to do a hanging belay, the Yosemite Haul System, where you would haul up all your supplies. I just thought, "Wow." After I saw that things just took off for me, I couldn't get enough climbing. So I stated going to the Garden of the Gods more and more and more. I worked at an army surplus store at the time and they had some soft iron and so climbing with Barton. We'd combine our gear together, we actually ended up buying a rope together and stuff. We climbed in his back yard, go out to the Garden of the Gods and play around in as things progressed. Mostly in the Garden, it's like sport climbing; you'd go from bolt to bolt. It wasn't like you were placing your own gear and stuff. I'd go like, "Wow, I'd like to pursue this more." So I learned how to aid climb, so we bought pitons.

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Basically you could go out to North Cheyenne Canyon, because the Army would do this display out there. They'd pull up in these buses and all these soldiers would get out and they'd hand them all a piece of rope, like 12' or 15' long, three pitons, and that was their gear for the day. They'd have their water and then they would pass around a hammer. So these guys would go around and just beat the pins in to the surrounding cliffs there in North Cheyenne Canyon. They'd go up and rappel, I'd watch them rappel. They had this Tyrolean also set up there from, it was called "the crow's nest," it was this little spire and they had a cable that went from there down to these bleachers there in North Cheyenne Canyon. I really don't know if they are even there or not any more. Watching that was like, "Wow, this is pretty cool." The cord or rope they gave them was like what we could call a cordelette now, but that was their harness right. So they would undo the rope, they'd form a leg loop, tie it around their waist, tie a square knot, so that's what I did. So I learned how to rappel out there. You could score pitons, that was the main thing. They would just go smash them; they would all get like three of them. There would be maybe a hundred soldiers there, all up and down North Cheyenne Canyon. They'd just go smashing; some in trees, some in cracks, some were just kind of barely hanging. So you could actually get a lot of used gear. So one thing led to the next and you would get all the aid climbs in basically in the Garden of the Gods with Barton and I climbed a lot with this guy named Rip Morgan who took out to be, married my older sister, so he was my

brother in law. We climbed a lot together, because one he had a car. I'd see that turquoise mustang at the top of the hill, and I'd get out of school and go, "Cool, I get to go play for a while." So that was a lot of fun. So I did a lot with my brother in law at the time, they are divorced now. We did a lot of adventures together not only in the Garden of the Gods but we started going to Turkey Rock, just south of that area. Basically there is a lot of climbing around Colorado Springs. Mostly because of limited time, we would mostly go to the Garden of the Gods or end up in North Cheyenne Canyon. So that was kind of my grass roots of starting out climbing there.

Interviewer: Was there a guide book at that time for the Garden of the Gods?

Douglas Snively: No.

Interviewer: How did you find your routes?

Douglas Snively: I would go to, there was a shop downtown, it was called "The Mountain Chalet." It had just kind of opened and there was a guy there, his name was "Muff," his real name was Steve Chaney, but everybody called him Muff. He was a climber and he once took Barton and I out and we top roped the White Spire and he showed us some things, how to belay. Everything was a body belay, no belay device or anything. The rope just went around your waist and you just held on tight. So that was our, kind of our source of information as far as the climbs went around the Colorado Springs area. Then as Turkey Rock became developed you pretty much knew everybody that was going up there. I met Jimmy Dunn out in North Cheyenne Canyon; he actually showed me how to tie in using a water knot instead of a square knot. So then I started climbing with Jimmy a lot and that was kind of a real heads up for me because he was pretty talented already at the time.

Interviewer: So who would you say your mentors were?

Douglas Snively: I would say it was everybody I would climb with. I would say Jimmy Dunn was a good mentor, Dan McClure definitely was a very talented individual and his ethics were impeccable. It was like going with Daniel was always a privilege.

Interviewer: What do you mean by, "His ethics were impeccable?"

Douglas Snively: No hanging, you did it your first try or else you didn't do it. You don't hang on gear, you don't rehearse the moves, it's like you just do it. And he would do it. He was really a talented individual.

Interviewer: Who were some of the big names at the time? Like people who looked like the rock stars?

Douglas Snively: Of course, Royal Robbins, Yvon Chouinard, Tom Frost. Anybody who that was doing pioneering in Yosemite at the time. Those were like, “Wow,” they were doing these really impressive climbs right on a big piece of rock. It was really hard to say but basically people who really looked up to were probably my comrades that I really went out with from day to day and that was a lot of fun.

Interviewer: Can you think of any experiences that shaped your climbing later in life?

Douglas Snively: That’s a good question. I think there’s a lot of experiences that lead in, one experience leads to another experience and such is life. That’s the way things are. Some were not such good experiences and some were like, “Wow, this is a really great experience here and let’s do it again.” So it might be at a different cliff or a different location all together.

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Interviewer: This was like in high school level or high school?

Douglas Snively: Yeah, I was in high school. I started climbing basically at 16, I was a sophomore. So I climbed a lot with Barton, my brother-in-law. Then I met Bill Westbay and Dan McClure and Jimmy Dunn. And then things really changed, meaning those guys, once they had already all gone to Yosemite. Then one summer, Barton’s parents said they were going up to the Pacific Northwest, that they were going down through California to Yosemite. I had just started climbing, but of course you know you always hear things about Yosemite. So basically I went on his family vacation with him. We went to Yosemite and we were only there about two days or something like that. But it was a lot of fun; it was a real eye opener. No one was up on El Cap, but I could envision, “Wow, this was just like a huge rock.” I wasn’t really sure because I was pretty naïve in a lot of ways. We went over to Middle Cathedral Rock with our little bit of gear that we had thinking we’d climb Middle Cathedral that day. After getting up like a pitch and a half we realized we were going like nowhere quick. You’d look over at El Cap and we were still way down here and it’s still way up there. That was a pretty cool experience in that I realized like, “Wow, this is really what I kind of want to do.” So it made high school tough the last year. [laughter]

Interviewer: Alright, so how did you end up at Estes Park? What was your first experience up here?

Douglas Snively: My first experience in Estes was when I was a senior in high school. Stewart Green and I came up to climb the Diamond on Longs Peak. That was my first experience which was kind of huge when I think about it in that, a lot of it, I was pretty naïve and we had the Paul Nesbit book and it had some pictures of someone on Table Ledge, just kind of standing there. And then some people aid climbing. That was it. It said something about

D-7 and we'd go, "Well we could probably go do that, right." I had been practicing nailing a lot in the Garden of the Gods and Turkey Rock and the South Platte Area. So Stewart came up on our spring break from school and I drove my '55 Chevy up here and drove right into the Longs Peak parking lot. Started hiking up basically with what gear we had and went up to the Diamond. I can't remember, I think we hiked in, spent the night by Chasm Lake then got up to Broadway the next day and started just climbing. Luckily Don Deset and Mike Dudley were up there doing the Yellow Wall. They were a lot of encouragement because Stewart kind of "bombed out" so to speak, he just wasn't into it so I lead all the pitches. I had made this hammock that I had bived with that night. In the books you'd read about Yosemite, in the Nesbit book you'd see someone in a down jacket and that's what you wore for your bivey sack. I had the _____. I remember being so cold that my teeth were chattering so bad that they hurt for like three days. My jaws hurt on the sides. Stewart I think was a little bit more prepared because he'd climbed Keeners before, so he was kind of like, "Oh I know how to get up there," type of deal, "and I know how to get down." "Well great, ok, let's go." So we ended up doing the Diamond, we bivouacked on the face. Finished the next day, hiked out in the dark and were both very exhausted. I remember it was like much more work than we realized.

Interviewer: You said this was over spring break?

Douglas Snively: Yeah.

Interviewer: That would be like March?

Douglas Snively: Yes, end of March, very cold and a lot of snow on the hike in. I just figured, "Well, that's the way it always was." I didn't realize if you came in July or August it was going to be much nicer and a little more pleasant for bivouacs and stuff. We made it and I was glad that Don and Mike were up there and they, "Come on, you guys can do this." They were good motivators. They were always right over here and they'd go, "Ok, another pitch." They bivouacked right there and they were gone the next day, like instantly it seemed like.

Interviewer: That was your first experience in Estes Park, that's a pretty good one.

Douglas Snively: Yeah.

Interviewer: How did you end up moving up here then?

Douglas Snively: After that I traveled around, did some climbing with Jimmy down in the desert. Then we drove back through here because I never really came into town on that first trip here. So I didn't really realize that Lumpy Ridge was there, Lilly Mountain and stuff. As we came through we visited a friend of Jimmy's in Allenspark, Michael Covington at the time. We stopped at Lilly Lake and we did a climb up on one of the Buttresses there.

We drove on into town and Jimmy was going, "That's Lumpy Ridge," and bla, bla, bla. That was kind of my first view of it. So basically I fell in love with the place, I really did. Plus it was such a concentrated place of lots of climbing and so I knew that moving here pretty much full time, kind of off and on for a few years, in '72. We'd crash at Komito's shop. At the time he was out at Beaver Point, which was at Mary's Lake Road and the highway there. We'd just sleep between the rows of boots. I loved it because smell of the leather was so nice. I'd just roll my bedroll out between the Vericors and the P.A.'s over here and the R.D.'s, he had them all hanging up on racks. Someone else would be sleeping in the next isle over there. In the morning you'd just roll up your bedroll and put it away and go goof off for the rest of the day. So Komito was very tolerable of all of us kind of outlaws just hanging out in his shop.

15:30

Interviewer: Who else was hanging out at Komito's shop at this time?

Douglas Snively: There was Michael Covington was there and he had the guide service or the concession to the Park. It was just like basically Michael, Billy, and I and then Dan McClure on occasion. When I first came here I moved to Ft. Collins first and I stayed with Dan and his brother Bruce. They had his kind of funky place they called it "Moore Manner." Dan's brother was very much, I wouldn't say, yeah, hippie. He had goats and chickens in the house and you just kind of shoo the chicken off the couch. And there's the goat, it's kind of like push it outside. I found it kind of like a little bit much for me so I slept outside under this camper shell because it didn't have funny odors and stuff. I felt like I had my own little domain there. I stayed there, so I stayed there and then we'd come up here on the weekends and I'd ended up starting working for Michael Covington and ended up just staying here.

Interviewer: So you got introduced into all of this through Jimmy Dunn mostly?

Douglas Snively: Pretty much, yeah.

Interviewer: You started working for Covington as a guide?

Douglas Snively: Yeah. It took a while because it was so slow. Really there was only enough work for one or two people. Then as things grew it became where there would be three of us working full time, then four of us. Each season it got busier and busier. Then in 1973 Steve moved the shop from the Beaver Point place down to where Colorado Mountain School is now. We all hung out upstairs, Michael had rented the upstairs, Steve had the downstairs, so all us guides would live upstairs and we'd work and go play on Lumpy Ridge and do routes in the Park all of the time.

Interviewer: Why was it called Fantasy Ridge?

Douglas Snively: It was just a name that Michael came up with. I'm not sure where the Fantasy part came from, to be honest with you I don't really don't know. I'm sure he could tell you some hair brained story about it all. [laughter]

Interviewer: So what did you do as a guide?

Douglas Snively: Mostly as a guide we taught a lot of beginning courses. So we had different things called, "Basic Rock Craft" would be where you'd just go out and learn simple things like, put your harness on, tie into the rope, tie into the belay anchor itself, and also how to rappel. And then at the end of the day we would show people how to belay, going from tree to tree and run backwards and take a little. So they'd have an idea of what it was like to catch a fall on stuff. At the end of the day we'd hike back over this way on Lumpy Ridge towards Twin Owls and we had this little small spire there and we'd call that "Basic Rock." So at the end of the day that was kind of the highlight, you'd climb the small spire, rappel off the top, that was the end of the day. If you wanted to pursue things, we had Rock One, Rock Two courses. In Rock One you would go in, you'd learn how to place gear and basically hexentrics and stoppers. There were some cams at the time, not too many. We'd pretty much just stick with basics. As things progressed you'd learn to show people how to place belay anchors, how to belay up, down and maybe lower someone if they were having a problem. So it would really depend on what they would want to do. Some people would really pursue things. Most of the time you would just do a basic class and that was it. Then we had a thing setup where you'd do basic Rock One and Rock Two and then climb Hallett's Peak or the Petit Grepon as kind of the grand finale thing. You'd give them a little certificate that they had passed this course and then did the climb at the end and that was their choice to do the Grepone or Hallett's Peak. Most people would choose the Grepone. So I've climbed the Grepone twenty some times.

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Interviewer: What kind of clients were they? Were they from Colorado, were they?

Douglas Snively: They were from everywhere. A lot of people would find out about climbing and just wanted basically a general knowledge I felt. Just for their own peace of mind, so if someone asked them a question about climbing they could give a good answer. So a lot of people came from the Midwest, and mostly that's where a lot of them would come from. Yeah, there were people from Colorado, from the South. We have a pretty big tourist industry here from Texas, so a lot of people would be from Texas. Some people from the East Coast but seldom, that's kind of a long ways. Also I found that, it seemed like a lot of people from the East would either go to the Tetons before they would come down here. So they maybe have taken a course through Exum Mountain Guides then come down and climb with us for a few days. So a lot of times you'd have a lot of people

who would be return clients. Like I guided this guy Ed Yule for years and he was just a blast because he's an older guy. Took him up to the Diamond when he was like 56 years old. That's pretty impressive for a guy who would climb once a year. He would get in shape, he played tennis a lot and he was kind of a mad scientist type guy. Little small guy in stature. I have some pictures of him on the Diamond; he'd always wear like a dress shirt, kind of a nice dress shirt, like polyester pants and stuff. He'd have his little hat on and be all like ready to go, but he was very talented and I did some wonderful things with him on Longs Peak. We did the Grepon; we did Hallett's, a bunch of different routes on Hallett's Peak, Zumie's Thumb. A lot of stuff on the lower east face of Longs Peak. He really did like Longs Peak. The return climbs were really what you wanted because then you were really getting to go climbing and you weren't just an instructor then.

Interviewer: So a story I've come across about you during your guiding days is on the climb of the Ancient Mariner. The rumor has it is, so that's a bolted line now, but the rumor has it that you went up on that face without bolts and while you were guiding a client.

Douglas Snively: No, I was actually with this young lady by the name of Ann Tarbor. And on the first pitch, as you know, you pull over the first pitch and well there's a bolt there, but there wasn't, I had a stopper in there. Then I started up the face and it was kind of real smooth so I traversed right and got back over to, what's the climb called there in the corner?

Interviewer: Sorcerer?

Douglas Snively: The Sorcerer. So basically I went over the Roof and traversed over to the Sorcerer which was quite hard really and pretty spooky because there was no gear. So I didn't really do that whole next pitch unprotected or anything. It was like I basically pulled over the Roof, traversed over to the Sorcerer. And Richard Roster

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and partner finished that off which is a beautiful climb, it really is.

Interviewer: So you moved to Estes, you started working as a guide. Did that give you a lot of free time?

Douglas Snively: Not really, in the summer, that first year I stayed here I had free time and because I needed money I would go to Ft. Collins and work at Keefer Concrete because they would always hire me back. Then in the summer I would come back up here and then guide, so it would depend. At first there was free time and then it kind of seemed like you were busy and you

spent your whole summer guiding. Like to the point, it's like, "Wow, I'm going out every day." For a couple of years it was a lot of fun then it became a job and it was kind of like, "Wow, I'm spending all of my time just working now, not really climbing for the love of climbing." It wasn't bad, it was all in all a good experience, I met some wonderful people through guiding. And then some people are coming, it seems like they just kind of unload their kids for the day and get rid of them. Basically you are a baby sitter sometimes. All and all it was a lot of fun; I have no regrets at all. I met a lot of wonderful people and I kind of became, Estes Park really became roots then for me.

Interviewer: What did you do in your winters?

Douglas Snively: Winter, if we had the money we'd hang out. If you didn't have any money you'd have to go find a job some place. For a few winters I would go down and work in Ft. Collins at this concrete plant. They'd always go, "Why do you want to go back up there in the summer?" I always felt like if I work someplace I would try to do as best, as good a job as possible. They never really wanted me to quit because after a few days there they gave me a truck, laborers, all these people and they really wanted me to stay. They treated me extremely well and I just wanted to live in Estes Park. They actually would say, "It's ok," I didn't have a vehicle at the time; they would let me drive the company truck up here on the weekends. I'd crash out at Komito's and either hike around in the winter time going ice climbing some place or skiing, just basically ended up staying here.

Interviewer: One of the more iconic photos for Estes Park climbing is that photo that's in Gillette's book of you and the rest of the Fantasy Ridge guides out in front of Lumpy there. Can you tell me about that photo? Remember that day?

Douglas Snively: Yeah, it was, Michael at the time was going with this lady named Jenny Roper and she was a very good photographer. She used to work at the Ansel Adams studio there in Yosemite, so she was quite savvy on art. She was an artist for one thing. She was a very good photographer so she ended up taking the picture. That was myself and Bill Westbay and Dan McClure, Michael and Jim Bridwell. We were all working pretty much full time then.

Interviewer: Was that sign from the, Covington is leaning on sign, was that?

Douglas Snively: Yeah, that's a sign that I had carved I believe out, out of chisel and stuff. It was the sign we'd hung up at the shop. It was pretty nice; it's a cool photo really. It's pretty classic really.

Interviewer: It reminds me of the Billy Westbay and Bridwell after they did the Nose where you are standing out in the meadows there. So anytime you look into the history of climbing in Estes Park, undoubtedly you come across

Komito and you've mentioned staying on his floor and stuff. Can you explain why Komito is so important to the climbing community around here?

Douglas Snively:

It was kind of like he was grounded here already and he had his shop here and he had moved here with his family and they had a place up on Davis Hill where he still lives today. I think it was a place for all of us to come; I first met Komito in his shop in Boulder. I was with Jimmy and I think we were climbing in Eldorado or someplace for the day and we went over to Steve's shop and that's where I first met him. Duncan Ferguson was working for Steve at the time and that was pretty much it. When he moved the shop to Estes Park, it was like he was the source of information, even though he didn't get to get out as much as he probably would have liked to. It was kind of like; he was always saying, "Well you guys can stay here," and stuff which was huge really. I mean I don't know if I would have been that willing to open my doors up and have a store and have all these kind of long haired people just kind of come in and take over the place. But he was fine with it as long as we had cleaned up our mess and stuff. He used to tease us how it would always smell like bacon when he'd come to work because Michael would cook bacon every morning in the back. In the back of the shop where we kind of lived there was some sinks and we had a couple of Coleman stoves. It was kind of like camping out, but you did have a roof over your head. Steve was very tolerable for letting people come and just crash out. His house was always open to anyone. I have to admire him for that, I really do. That was a good place to hang out; we lived in his shop for like years, like in the main shop. At a time I lived down in the vault for a long time. It was just because no one was in there, I could sleep in there and it was like really dark and quiet. You would kind of just push the big door shut and you could leave all of your stuff in there, it was fine. There would be sometimes people, maybe twelve, maybe fifteen people just all over the floor of his store. It was kind of like, "Ok he's going to get here soon, you have to get up and get moving and get out of the way." He was very tolerable of all of us; it's like kind of amazing really. Things did get broken and hopefully he never really got ripped off, but I think he did from people, which was sad. I'm not going to point fingers at people, I could but I won't. It was just kind of a central hub and it was a source of information. People would come to us, like the Gillette brothers when they started climbing here a lot, Bernard and John would come up and ask us about routes on Lumpy Ridge. The only real guide book was one from Walter Fricke; it was more kind of a general description of things in the mountains. Of course he had the Diamond and other peaks along the Front Range there. It was just basic, pretty general and not so. If we could something and pass on the information, a lot of people came there just to get information basically. Or would call and want to know, "Is there snow, is there any ice climbing?" And we'd try to help out as best we could.

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Interviewer: So as a general rule, you had to be up and about by the time?

Douglas Snively: By nine, yeah, which was pretty easy basically. It was a place of business and so clean up your mess and put it away. Basically the guides up stairs, it was pretty good. You could put stuff in the closet, there were all these kind of cubby holes, everybody could have their own little cubby hole to put your pack and stuff in. When you think about it you really didn't have that much then also. Out in the parking lot would be everybody's old cars, some of them would be broken down and sit there for a long time until it got hauled off or fixed. It was a fun time, it really was.

Interviewer: So you were up here with a lot of friends from Colorado Springs. Did you find that there were like groups of people? I'd also heard that there was a group of Boulder people up here too doing guiding. Did you feel like there was kind of like groups going on?

Douglas Snively: Kind of, sort of. Like there was the Boulder climbers and the C. Springs climbers and always, I wouldn't say there was a rivalry there, but you kind of felt it sometimes. Like all these guys from C. Springs you know, so it was kind of funny. We all had long hair; they were always the clean cut type, scholarly type people. Which is fine, there is some really good people there. So yeah, I would say there was probably some rivalry there but not so bad, not unbearable where you're verbally abusing one another or anything.

Interviewer: Do you think that helped the climbing to push further?

Douglas Snively: Yeah, I think so. Those people were extremely driven. I'm kind of a lazy person, like once I get motivated I'm fine, I get going and I get after it. These people were always like training and doing things. I never trained until basically I lived with John Backer and it helped immensely.

Interviewer: You and John Backer put up a pretty substantial route up on Twin Owls. Can you talk about what that was like?

Douglas Snively: Because I lived with John and he was, I would say on the cutting edge of climbing. He was leagues above everybody else, he really was. A lot of people that put him down and stuff, basically that's a jealousy thing. I can honestly believe that because John was extremely talented. He loved Bruce Lee and I think he looked at Bruce Lee as like kind of a role model, like this guy that would train for what he loved to do. John would train, he had me out there training for a while, it made a big difference. So yeah, we climbed West Owl Direct, it was called. John did it in his typical style of you hang on, you do the moves, you fiddle with the protection, you get it in. No hanging on the gear and then figuring out, he just like basically hiked up the thing. I was able to second out with no problem at all, it was just because John always had me out, "Ok, we are going to do basically

200 pull ups tonight with weights,” and it helped, it really does help to train. So I had some wild standing where you are almost in the splits and stuff, but you could rest your head against the rock and actually draw up your arms and get a good rest and then carry on. We were both so stoked after doing that, it was a pretty big day. It was probably the hardest climb on Lumpy Ridge at the time. It was kind of neat, he didn’t fall, I didn’t fall. After that we went and did another climb that afternoon which was a pretty hard climb also and it felt much easier. It was probably 11b or c, that route. Yeah, he was a good motivator, he really was.

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Interviewer: Do you know why it was named “Silly Putty?”

Douglas Snively: Because they said, “After he led the pitch his arms just felt like there was nothing left,” so that’s why he called it Silly Putty.

Interviewer: So you got a whole lot of climbing up on Lumpy?

Douglas Snively: Yes.

Interviewer: What would you say, what’s your favorite crag up there?

Douglas Snively: I’d say kind of would the place I go for the day, I hate to say there’s one crag that I like more than the other, but I love Sundance, I love going to Sundance because, well I think it’s the taller crag of it all. I can’t say there’s a specific route I love on any particular rock. I like doing variations of lots of different climbs. Like on the Book I used to love doing Fat City to the High Plains Drifter to either Cheap Date or High Plains Drifter as a finish and that gave you all these pretty technical pitches, but it made for really a beautiful climb. So I like kind of, I can go up and I can weave all over the place and put together things that are all the kind of better pitches of certain climbs, and that’s a lot of fun to do.

Interviewer: What would you say your proudest climb is up there?

Douglas Snively: That’s tough, I mean. Of course Silly Putty was a proud moment because nothing had ever been done that hard before on Lumpy Ridge. A lot of that was John right, I didn’t lead the pitch. I think really you as a climber, when you lead the pitch that’s really where the credit should go. I was able to second it and I didn’t have a hard time with it. I mean it’s hard but it wasn’t like I was shaking or anything. I always felt like I was under total control.

Interviewer: Ok, let’s get back to guiding. So you guided to the late ‘70s. When did you quite guiding?

Douglas Snively: Probably the earlier ‘80s, then I started working for Komito more full time. So I would guide for Michael and then I started helping Steve at the

shop, resoling boots and selling footwear. At the old shop he used to sell a lot of footwear and that was kind of fun. People would come and they would have certain boots you could only buy at Komito Boots. That was kind of a neat thing. As time progresses then you are competing with other big outdoor retailers and that makes life a little tough.

Interviewer: And then when did you start getting into rigging?

Douglas Snively: That was the early '90s when, I mean I had done a small job on Twin Owls, here was my first real movie job and that was through Michael Lease. He wasn't there at the time but he gave the job to Duncan Ferguson and Duncan was kind of in charge. We'd just go up and set up anchors for the camera men. Duncan took a long fall off the top of Twin Owls and shot over West Owl Direct where Silly Putty is, is called now. So he shot off those overhangs and probably took like a 60 foot fall. It's kind of a motivation type film for corporate ladder type people. Like, "You too can work up the ladder if you're motivated to do these." Somehow kind of, I have a copy of it, you can watch it sometime, it's kind of silly really. After being in the business for a long time, I look back at my first job verses what I do now, it's really quite different. But it was fun; I met some neat people, some who I had worked for before. I did some rigging once up on El Cap for this guy named Roger Brown who was a videographer. You'd _____ lots of kind of mountaineering films and stuff.

14:22

Interviewer: I'm sure you were dressed up as Tony the Tiger.

Douglas Snively: Yes, yes. I really wasn't dressed as Tony the Tiger, but you would wear orange shorts and an orange tee shirt and that's how I got into the union which is called SAG. So I was basically doing a Frosted Flakes commercial. So I was Tony the Tiger, I did some rappelling and then that job led to other Tony the Tiger commercials. We did one on kayaking, one on biking. It was fun so that's how I did get into the union which is called SAG, Screen Actors Guild. Basically my first real film job was the one on Twin Owls and then the next year I went and we worked on Cliff Hanger in Italy. There was a bunch of us that went there, like I don't know, sixteen climbers and met a lot of talent. That's where I met Dave Schultz, Brook Sandel from the Northwest; those guys were all extremely talented climbers. Bret _____ was there and myself. Mike Weis of course, he was our boss. Paul Sibley a friend of Mike's from Boulder and some other Boulder climbers were there. Kevin Donald was there, so yeah, it was fun. It's been a great change for me; it allowed me to buy a home here in Estes Park. Either that or I'd probably still be working at Komito's and still just struggling along.

Interviewer: You are pretty much based out of Estes Park. Why did you choose Estes? Why do you live here?

Douglas Snively: Basically because I fell in love with the climbing here. I love Lumpy Ridge, I really do. It's kind of weird, because sometimes I go, "Ah, I'm kind of tired of this place." All I have to do is go work in some awful city someplace and I come home and I realize how fortunate I am to live in this really beautiful area, and it really is. Despite the tourists and all the houses and homes here, it's easy to just walk away from it all. Just so to Lumpy Ridge, you are away from it. Or anyplace in the Park, you hike a mile in someplace and there's not that many people really. Even now today. I love Estes Park, I really do. Plus I have the friendship here that's built up over the years. That would make it extremely hard to leave here, it really would.

Interviewer: Speaking of the Park, what are some of your favorite areas up in the Park?

Douglas Snively: I think probably one of my favorite valleys is by Spearhead there, Black Lake, the back side of Longs. Because you have McHenry's there, Arrowhead. It's just beautiful there with the high mountain lakes. You get up high and you look down the valley and you look out across the plains, it's really quite nice.

Interviewer: What are some of your favorite days up in the Park? Do you remember?

Douglas Snively: I'd say probably climbing the Diamond for the first time was one of my favorites. That was a huge ordeal at the time. When I think about it, it was kind of a big deal. That my first climb here in the park. When I think back on it, most people don't just go right up on the Diamond and start climbing. A lot of that is probably I didn't know any better at the time also. [laughter] So it made things really actually kind of very rememberable. I remember I came up and I had '55 Chevy, I wish I had the photos of it; I don't know what happened to it. I went out of my way to take pictures and I have like two. I don't know where they are.

Interviewer: You've also done some trips to the Greater Ranges, right? Like to the Himalayas?

Douglas Snively: Yes, I've been to India once; I've been to Pakistan twice. The first time I went to Pakistan I went on a film crew with, it's called WQED International Geographic. It was the first time that Karakoram had been shut down for like 12 or 13 years and they'd just opened up the valley again for expeditions to go in. So we were supposed to go in and make this film on how expeditions affected the villages and then go up and film some famous climbers climbing in. It really never evolved, like it was too big of a project for the size crew they had. When I look back on it, it was like, there was myself, there was a guy by the name of Dick Dumais that went and we were supposed to hump all the loads and carry all the stuff up to these places. Which I didn't mind doing but it was a lot of work and the camera guys couldn't really keep up with the climbers because you have these guys that are highly skilled and you have camera people who had

never left say a staged type setting, say like in the room here. So for them to just go out and hike up to the Baltoro Glacier was a huge ordeal. There's a lot of interconflict between the film people and the climbers, so even though National Geographic basically give them a huge chunk of money to pay for their trip, it just never evolved or turned out to anything. We climbed a small peak there called Karpogang and didn't really film it because it was just too much work. So I'd hiked up myself and found a way up through this pass with this guy named Charles Grossbeck who was the video photographer at the time. Then we came down, we were going to go up, and then a bunch of us climbed this small peak on the border of China and Pakistan. A lot of the reason we choose that because we could say we'd been to China because it was still closed to basically the white person. It used to be a spice trade route over this pass. So we went up to this pass and then climbed a small peak that was like less than 20,000' there.

20:30

Interviewer: You've also done a little bit of ice climbing around here, which I was not aware of until I started researching you. I found out you did the first ascent of The Squid [1977], which according to Mountain Project, is the best single pitch of ice in Colorado. Can you tell us about that, how did you?

Douglas Snively: Yeah, I did that with Duncan Ferguson, we had both worked together for Steve for many years so I climbed quite a bit with Duncan. He's a really kind of a specialized, you know he's was really good at anything he did. We trained a lot, we would like traverse around Steve's shop with our ice tools and our mountain boots on the molding right, like here. So you'd hook your ice tools up over like the top of the sill and go around and then you'd have to do a pull-up at each door. We'd also do it as bouldering, so we had this thing where you could start in the basement and go up to the main floor and then end up on the third floor and then traverse back down. So by the time you do all this, you've done 40 some pull-ups, and so it was quite the work out. So Duncan and I, we trained pretty hard to do The Squid. We attempted it several different times. Because once it was very thin, he went up a ways came down then I went up. I got a little bit higher and I got some pins in the rock out to the side. We went up another day and it was a total disaster just because the weather was so bad. We finally ended up doing it. Duncan, because as winter went on it got a little bit thicker and thicker. So Duncan led the first pitch and then I led the next pitch after that. And it was wild; it was probably cutting edge at the time, definitely.

Interviewer: What year was that?

Douglas Snively: I can't remember really, probably about the latter '70s probably [1977]. Yeah, we did a bunch of ice climbing. We used to just kind of like drive around in the car, we'd drive down the St. Vrain Canyon, "Oh, there's a

little patch of ice,” and we’d run up there and we’d boulder up it. Usually one person would do it; it’d all cave in and just fall down. We’d drive around and find another little patch,

22:43 [End of Part B.]

[C].

00:00

but we did a lot of stuff in the Park. We did Jaws Falls, did The Squid, some stuff up on by Notch Top. Loch Vale of course and Wild Basin, all the standard stuff.

Interviewer: Do you still ice climb?

Douglas Snively: Not really, I don’t really care for it all that much. I don’t really care for the cold that much. Wearing glasses, it’s like, it was always a nightmare, you’d always fog up. I remember once guiding up at Black Lake and I’m way up on this thing and my client is like way down there and I’m at the crux and my glasses were so iced over, I couldn’t even see. I’m just like pecking away at the ice, I’m going, “I really don’t like this anymore,” plus I’m freezing cold. I mean I would go, I still have gear but around here it’s a lot of effort to get to the ice. Unlike some places like in Southern Colorado, a lot of ice coming down there. You’d get out of the car, you go over to the ice is right there, you don’t hike for two miles to five miles to do a one pitch ice climb.

Interviewer: Another famous picture of you is on the cover of Gillett’s Guide Book. Can you tell us how that took place?

Douglas Snively: Yeah, I used to climb a lot. Bernard and I climbed a lot together and I can say, Bernard was a really, he is like a driven person, it’s like amazing. We used to do a lot together. I’ve known him since he was a small, very small. His parents would come out, his dad was a professor and they’d stay at their summer home here. All the kids would go hiking or climbing. It was kind of a neat family thing that they did. So I climbed a lot with Bernard and some with his brother John. They have another brother named Robert. Bernard’s doing the new guide book so he wants to take a photo of The Edge of Time, and so I’m up there and it’s very cold, it’s winter time. I’m like up by the top, he ties me off to this tree and then he runs backward and climbs up another tree and he’s over there in the top of this tree and it’s swaying back and forth. And he’s taking, “Ok, hold on.” It’s pretty cold, but that’s how the shot came about. Bernard took a lot of pictures, not only with a lot of his comrades also. The Hill brothers he climbed a lot with and other people around town. But he climbed a lot with his brother John; they were pretty awesome pair together really.

Interviewer: When I looked through the guidebook I see you guys, you and Bernard seem to have a lot of first ascents, especially down in the St. Vrain and the Big Thompson. It seems like you guys climbed together a lot.

Douglas Snively: Yeah, we did.

Interviewer: Do you have some good stories from those climbs?

Douglas Snively: I always enjoyed being with Bernard. I mean he is a very pleasant person to be around. There is never this ego problem or this competition thing like I can feel with some people. With Bernard it's never ever been that way. Bernard loves climbing for the love of climbing, kind of like myself. So it was always fun to go with Bernard, it's still fun to get together and be with him even though he's got a family of five children and stuff. He still has this driving energy, he still gets out. He does his job well; he's actually a really wonderful person to get to go climbing with. It's always been a real pleasure to be with Bernard. Plus it was fun knowing his whole family. When they'd come here they'd come up to Fantasy Ridge upstairs, and him and John would ask us questions about routes on Lumpy Ridge and we'd tell them. Then they'd come back, "Oh, we did that," and they would be all like so excited about it. It made it all worthwhile and then later we started climbing a lot together. He pretty much came out to go to school in Boulder, so he had a motor cycle and he's kind of an amazing person. He would climb all the time, he would do his studies and he met Sally and they have this wonderful family together now. He's still highly motivated, he still climbs a lot.

Interviewer: Then one more picture I would like to talk about was you, I came across this on the internet, you were on the cover of Climbing Magazine in 1974. What's the story behind that? Remember that picture?

Douglas Snively: Oh, on Candlestick Tower. Yeah, it was a Jimmy Dunn trip with I think John Berg was another guy and Larry Hamilton. And Larry Hamilton climbed a lot around here, he was from Boulder and he climbed a lot here in the Estes Valley and up in the Park. He has some good stuff here. So we all got together. This is a climb, a big buttress out in the middle of Canyon Lands [National Park] that had never been climbed before. So we drove out to Canyon Lands, we spent the night on the rim, we fixed lines over the rim to rappel to get down to the ground like probably 300' of fixed line. We hiked over to Candlestick Tower there and started fixing pitches and ended up on the top the next day. It was basically just a big aid climb, going up a nice big round corner. At the time it was something that hadn't been done yet in the desert which was kind of a cool thing to do.

05:24

Interviewer: You made lots of trips to the desert, right?

Douglas Snively: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: What were some of your favorite ones?

Douglas Snively: Oh, I loved doing like Moses was a really cool spire to do. I've actually been to the desert many times and I've actually climbed Moses many times since then. That was with Jimmy, Stuart Green, this guy called Kurt Rasmussen and Eric Bjornstad drove us in in his old van and kind of like, we didn't really know where we were and stuff. And our car was parked six miles away up this dirt road. When we were done we just kind of hiked back out, there were a lot of days where the hardware was all pitons, so you had this big rack of stuff to carry. Lots of carabineers and so a lot has changed for the better I would say. So yeah, Candlestick Tower was a good adventure. I just remember it was wonderful just spending a night out under the stars in the desert like it always is. It just seemed so bright and beautiful and quiet. Candlestick Tower as a good adventure. I haven't seen the guy, Larry Bird since then, I've run into Larry quite often after that but I'm not really sure where he is. Jimmy Dunn's in Colorado Springs.

06:43 [End of Part C. End of Interview.]

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ABSTRACT: Douglas Snively began climbing at age 16 in his native Colorado Springs at both the Garden of the Gods and North Cheyenne Canyon. Soon thereafter he briefly experienced both Yosemite and Rocky Mountain National Park. Mr. Snively shares details of his long and distinguished rock and ice climbing career in the Estes Park area and his association with numerous well known members of that climbing community. The interview includes a description of the role that Steve Komito has played in the formation of the Estes Park climbing community. He includes descriptions of rock climbing on Lumpy Ridge, in RMNP, and at Canyon Lands in Utah. As a climber, Douglas participated in a documentary film production in the Great Ranges of Pakistan and was featured in roles through the Film Actors Guild in both Colorado and Italy.

Note: Added material appears in brackets.

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